

# Preparing Teachers to Promote Culturally Relevant Teaching

## Helping English Language Learners in the Classroom

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### Introduction

Graduate students who know strategies for second language acquisition are more prepared to advocate for appropriate instructional accommodations to facilitate engagement of English language learners (ELLs; Daniel, 2008). Obstacles to comprehension for ELLs are decreased when teachers use purposeful tasks that use language productively and meaningfully and identify cultural links to texts.

In its *Second Language Literacy Instruction Position Statement*, the International Reading Association (IRA; 2003) recommends that teachers should commit to professional development in preschool-12th grade literacy as well as become knowledgeable of “the range of political, cultural, and economic issues” (p. 3) that affect all learners. In addition, to ensure success for ELLs, teacher preparation programs must mandate that reading specialist candidates be taught to work effectively with learners from different cultural and language backgrounds and know how to help ELLs overcome the linguistic and cultural barriers that they face in school.

Teachers face many challenges when trying to meet the needs of a diverse student population because the typical education teachers receive when seeking an undergraduate degree barely touches on the theories of second language acquisitions (Daniel, 2008). Furthermore, many graduate students who are certified teachers have voiced concern that they are not well prepared to make appropriate instructional accommodations for ELLs (McIntyre, Kyle, Chen, Munoz, & Beldon, 2010).

Thus, it is important for teacher preparation programs to offer opportunities for

future teachers to identify how to best plan and deliver instruction to ELLs and prepare them to differentiate instruction in ways that allow ELLs to achieve the literacy needed to succeed in school. Teacher candidates, particularly those enrolled in graduate programs, can benefit from experiences working with ELLs because doing so will allow them to become strategic teachers who design lessons that address both content and linguistic objectives.

In recent years, we have seen a huge increase in English language minority students in schools, thus making our schools more ethnically and linguistically diverse than ever before (August & Shanahan, 2006). Concerns linked to this diversity include the mismatch that often happens between students and teachers in terms of cultural understanding and a lack of research on providing high-quality instruction for English language minority students (August & Erikson, 2006). This increase in English language minority students in the United States requires us to pay attention to the content, skills, and context for learning that teachers need so that they in turn can be responsive to what ELLs need (August, 2006).

Echevarria, Vogt, and Short (2004) identified three major challenges to improving literacy of ELLs: (a) inadequate educator capacity, (b) inadequate use of research-based instructional practices, and (c) lack of a strong and coherent ELL literacy research agenda. These identified challenges make it easier to understand why ELLs struggle so much with academic content, and it is apparent that these obstacles have a negative impact on the development of ELLs' literacy, including the important components of higher-level thinking skills.

Numerous studies have indicated that effective differentiated instruction for ELLs involves culturally responsive teaching, high-quality multicultural literature, small group instruction, individual

progress monitoring, and one-on-one support (Irvine, 2003; Lesaux & Geva, 2006; McIntyre, 2010).

Despite the growing body of research-based strategies for use in classrooms, there is little research on how teachers implement literacy instruction for ELL students. In fact, many teachers struggle to implement instructional approaches that have been proven to address the needs of ELL students. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore how a graduate reading methods course provides teacher candidates opportunities for reflection and prepares them to differentiate instruction in ways that allow ELL students to achieve the literacy comprehension that is necessary to succeed in school.

### Graduate Reading Methods Course

The purpose of the graduate reading methods course examined as part of this study is to explore the reading specialist/literacy coach's role in helping teachers: (a) improve literacy instruction by assisting them in creating supportive environments for diverse language learners; (b) extend and refine their understanding of reading, writing, listening, and speaking processes and development; (c) implement effective instructional strategies and curriculum materials; and (d) understand the problems of struggling readers, including ELLs and gifted ELLs.

In order to accomplish the above, Vogt and Shearer (2010) suggested that reading specialists must have an understanding of first and second language and literacy acquisition. They should be assigned to work with ELLs, as well as teachers, administrators, special educators, and coordinators, to assess the language proficiency and literacy acquisition of the English learners. In addition, they must provide students with differentiated instructional practices that respond to language and culture in a

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variety of ways, and they must be trained to assess whether a student has a true reading problem or whether the difficulty is related to English language proficiency. Most importantly, reading specialists must work with classroom teachers to identify and explicitly teach the academic language of the content areas (McCormick & Zutell, 2015).

In the aforementioned graduate reading methods course, graduate students learn about the role of the reading specialist/literacy coach; learn about local, state, and national policies affecting reading, including the Common Core Standards; and reflect on their own development as professionals and leaders in literacy. They also review the IRA Standards for Reading Professionals and write a reflective paper on how to support classroom teachers in designing and implementing inclusive instructional approaches and materials that are based on the Common Core Standards and are responsive to diversity.

The focus of the class is on how differentiated instruction can be incorporated into classrooms to help ELL students acquire academic English as they negotiate meaning and acquire language (Daniel, 2008). More specifically, graduate students learn how to implement differentiated instruction that encompasses varied approaches to the content in response to ELL students' differences, interests, and learning needs. The graduate students learn that through differentiated instruction and activities, ELLs assume greater responsibility and ownership for their own learning, which is primarily focused on their learning styles, background experiences, and higher-order thinking.

Students in the graduate reading methods course are required to investigate a variety of professional literature to suggest how curriculum should be delivered to promote English language acquisition, help ELL students think critically, and enable ELLs to advance at the same rate as their monolingual classmates. As graduate students read more professional articles to find the best resources for their students, they are able to identify what their ELL students need and learn how to help them connect instruction to their known world.

## Methods

According to Merriam (1998), "Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meanings people have constructed, that is, how they make sense

of their world and the experiences they have in the world" (p. 6). This interpretivist perspective was used to frame this study's focus on qualitatively acquiring a deeper understanding of graduate students' experiences working with ELL students to help the students achieve the literacy comprehension necessary to succeed in school.

Sixteen graduate students—voluntary participants—were purposefully selected through intensity sampling to "identify sites or individuals in which the phenomenon of interest is strongly represented" (Mertens, 1998, p. 262). The graduate course was also purposefully selected because graduate students in the course are expected to reflect on their teaching experiences with ELL students, and participants were willing to submit their reflection papers and engage in asynchronous online discussions about their strategies and activities to support ELL students' literacy skills. Thus, in line with intensity sampling, the course and the students were suitable for this study.

The graduate reading methods course was one offered by a Mid-western university's Department of Early Childhood and Elementary Education and taught by the first author. The participants' ages ranged from 25 to 40 years. All were White female teachers who were teaching in early childhood or elementary classrooms during the period of this study. Of the 16 participants, 85% had taught for three years or less, and 15% had over five years of teaching experience.

### Data Collection

Data collection occurred throughout the spring 2014 academic term. Data collected included reflective paper grades as well as group discussions that took place on CANVAS—a web-based environment for teaching and learning. The methods course was taught through an online learning environment to enhance the sense of a professional learning community and to encourage graduate students' participation in an asynchronous online discussion. Assignments were evaluated based on whether a graduate student could identify specific pedagogical characteristics to effectively teach ELL students and engage in reflective conversations about research on first and second language acquisition.

The participants' knowledge, educational concepts, and literacy acquisition theories were evaluated through reflection papers and online discussions. Information gathered during lectures, readings, and class discussions was also taken into

consideration. The course grading rubric was based on criteria that corresponded to letter grades, specifically using the following benchmarks: *outstanding*, *satisfactory*, and *unsatisfactory* (see Table 1).

### Data Analysis

Data analysis occurred simultaneously with data collection due to the ongoing nature of data collection (Merriam, 1998). The literature on literacy instruction for ELL students (August & Erikson, 2006; Daniel, 2008; Echevarria et al., 2004; Vogt & Shearer, 2010) and the assignment rubric reflected in the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy and the IRA Standards for Reading Professionals were used as frameworks.

Specifically, data were analyzed through data analysis strategies grounded in the constant comparative method, in which each piece of data was constantly analyzed in comparison with previously collected data (Straus & Corbin, 1998). The participants' data sets (reflection papers and asynchronous online discussions) were analyzed following a step-by-step process (Merriam, 1998). First, the first author read and reread each set of data until she identified a unit of data, which refers to "any meaningful (or potentially meaningful) segment of data" (Merriam, 1998, p. 179).

In this study, the unit of data was literacy instruction for ELL students. As the first author read the graduate students' reflection papers and online discussions, she took notes on emerging insights, feelings, tentative concepts, and questions in the margins. Then she carefully checked and revisited the interpretation by comparing the reflection papers with online discussions in order to explicitly examine the participants' thoughts, perceptions, and feelings before new data collection occurred. After developing a sense of these data as a whole, the first author again recorded marginal notes on her feelings, thoughts, insights, tentative concepts, and questions based on the interpretation of the entire data set. Then she reviewed the marginal notes again and attempted to develop preliminary concepts, categories, and contexts. The themes evolved as new data were added (Merriam, 1998).

In the next step, the marginal notes developed from the initial data collection helped the first author shape the subsequent phase of data collection, pointed her in new analytical directions, and assisted her in developing and polishing future

questions for online discussions. The analytical process for the second set of data followed the same design as the analysis of the first data set. However, the first author made a separate list of comments, questions, and concepts generated from the second phase of analysis and then compared that list with the list derived from the previous analysis. She then merged the two lists into one, which reflected the conceptual direction of the research to that point. The next set of data, and all of the data gathered on an ongoing basis, was chronologically analyzed using the same process (Merriam, 1998).

In the third step, the first author periodically re-reviewed the interpretation of the whole data set on a weekly and monthly basis and conducted a preliminary cross-case analysis. She manually coded the data, looking for patterns, categories, and themes emerging from the collected data, comparing and contrasting sets on the basis of these categories, and considering the context of each data set (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). These comparisons were continually conducted within and between sets of data and among the participants. The first author also consciously engaged in a negative case analysis by looking for instances in the data that worked

against or contradicted her interpretations, seeking to notice possible alternative interpretations of events or data she had overlooked (Merriam, 1998).

Finally, after the data analysis was complete and emergent themes had been identified, the first author conducted a comprehensive cross-case analysis (Yin, 2003). She investigated the entire body of analysis she had produced throughout the study in order to refine and confirm or refute her preliminary analyses, and she highlighted themes with different colors and wrote coding numbers next to the subthemes within participants' data. In alignment with the research questions, she then developed a list to visually display overarching themes by combining similar categories that emerged from the analyzed data (Yin, 2003).

### Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore how a graduate reading methods course provides teacher candidates opportunities for reflection and prepares them to differentiate instruction in ways that allow ELL students to achieve the literacy comprehension necessary to succeed in school. Findings related to this purpose are presented in detail below.

### Assessment of Teacher Learning

A salient theme that emerged from the data analysis was the use of differentiated instruction that prioritizes and supports cultural competence (May, 2011). Exemplary teachers inspire their ELL students by creating respectful and comfortable effort-focused atmospheres where they differentiate strategies and scaffold students (Pressley et al., 2001).

From a culturally relevant teaching point of view, teachers must develop an ability to nurture and support ELL students' cultural competence by implementing a variety of strategies (Drucker, 2003; Miller, 2002; Park, 2014), such as repeated reading, visualizing, predicting, previewing, questioning, making connections, body language, facial expressions, gestures, and intonations. Certainly, children who are English language learners need individual instruction to assure an appropriate match between student skill and task demands (Burns & Helman, 2009). Despite their best efforts to support ELLs, teachers will face challenges, as evidenced by some of the participants' narratives of their own experiences. For example, one participant stated:

Working with a diverse group of students challenges the teacher to be able to reach

**TABLE I**  
**Essential Benchmark Rubric**

<b>Outstanding</b>	<b>Satisfactory</b>	<b>Unsatisfactory</b>
Reflective narrative addresses how the standard is met and reveals candidate's in-depth understanding of the standard. The candidate understands the importance of ELL students' interests, reading abilities, and backgrounds when planning reading programs, and when selecting materials for reading instruction. The candidate recognizes and is able to effectively model, coach, and support classroom teachers.	Reflective narrative addresses how the standard is met and reveals candidate's general understanding of the standard. The candidate has a general understanding of ELL students' interests, reading abilities, and backgrounds when planning reading programs, and when selecting materials for reading instruction. The candidate recognizes and is able to effectively model, coach, and support classroom teachers.	Reflective narrative addresses how the standard is met and reveals candidate's lack of understanding of the standard. The candidate has a limited understanding of ELL students' interests, reading abilities, and backgrounds when planning reading programs, and when selecting materials for reading instruction. The candidate cannot recognize and is not able to effectively model, coach, and support classroom teachers.
Candidate exhibits a defined and clear understanding of the assignment. Evaluation of reflection paper provides impressive and detailed evidence of candidate's ability to use various books and non-print materials appropriate for a diverse group of learners, and to effectively model, coach, and support classroom teachers that match a range of reading levels, interests, and the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of students.	Candidate exhibits a defined and clear understanding of the assignment. Evaluation of reflection paper provides some evidence of candidate's ability to use various books and non-print materials appropriate for a diverse group of learners, and to effectively model, coach, and support classroom teachers that match a range of reading levels, interests, and the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of students.	Candidate lacks basic understanding of the assignment. Evaluation of reflection paper demonstrates candidate lacks the ability to use various books and non-print materials appropriate for a diverse group of learners. The candidate lacks the ability to model, coach, and support classroom teachers that match a range of reading levels, interests, and the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of students.
Reflective narrative addresses how the diversity standard is met and reveals candidate's in-depth understanding of the standard. The candidate understands the importance of using various books and non-print materials appropriate for a diverse group of learners in reading programs. The candidate is able to effectively differentiate instruction and to model, coach, and support classroom teachers and paraprofessionals in using ELL students' interests and background experiences that match their linguistic proficiency level.	Reflective narrative addresses how the diversity standard is met and reveals candidate's general understanding of the standard. The candidate has a general understanding of how to use various books and non-print materials appropriate for a diverse group of learners in reading programs. The candidate is able to effectively differentiate instruction and to model, coach, and support classroom teachers and paraprofessionals in using ELL students' interests and background experiences that match their linguistic proficiency level.	Reflective narrative addresses how the diversity standard is met and reveals candidate's lack of understanding of the standard. The candidate has a lack of understanding of how to use various books and non-print materials appropriate for a diverse group of learners in reading programs. The candidate is not able to effectively differentiate instruction and to model, coach, and support classroom teachers and paraprofessionals in using ELL students' interests and background experiences that match their linguistic proficiency level.

all students during lessons. During this past school year my reading class consisted of 5 students that were ESL learners. During homeroom and writing time I had 6 students that are ESL learners. These students are given accommodations to help them succeed in the classroom. As a teacher it is a challenge to reach all of these students in every lesson. I have learned that ESL learners are better when they have hands on experiences and repetition.

Another participant discussed challenges she had personally encountered related to the significant individual differences in the amount of information retained by ELLs. These individual differences could be due to several variables including prior experiences, level of performance, and lack of equity. She revealed:

I have an ESL student who is also a special education student in one of my co-teaching English classes. It is very difficult to get this student to participate in classroom activities and her work is below that of all her peers. My co-teacher and I could not understand why this particular student was struggling so much in our classroom when we were providing all modifications and accommodations we could think of to service her disability. Eventually we came to realize that her poor performance was not due to her learning disability, but to her inability to understand what was going on in the classroom. We had observed her conversational skills and made assumptions based on those skills, not on her academic proficiency, which was much lower. We immediately began to work to make our classroom more risk free for her. It has been a very difficult task. This shows respect to the students and showed them that everyone, including me, is a learner in the classroom.

Finally, one participant warned against making incorrect assumptions about an ELL student's literacy level based on misleading cues. It is reasonably presumed that children with limited English proficiency need five to seven years and many experiences with English to be able to understand the content of instructional materials, which in turn is highly linked to reading comprehension (Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, & Christian, 2005). Research has found that although students can learn conversational language within two years, it takes much longer to engage at a higher academic level (Drucker, 2003). Thus, teachers often incorrectly assume that an ELL student demonstrates a mastery of literacy skills simply because he or she participates in conversations with friends or can speak one-on-one with

the teacher, and this assumption will have negative effects. For example:

Until recently I had a student in my classroom for two years that was not fluent in English because his family was originally from another country. He was very reserved and required and thrived much better with one on one instruction. The article discussed how there was a difference in the types of language that we must learn in order to survive in the classroom setting. When I look back and different instances I had with this student I came to the realization that he was learning two different types of speaking. Although he was weak in both conversation and academic language, I would have to say that he was stronger in using his conversational language. I do believe that this took effect because I was so unsure of how to model for him in both his language and in English in order for him to get a better understanding. I realized that when you have a student in your classroom that it is vital for their development that you build background knowledge for them and provide a variety of cues and prompts for them to learn from.

Other participants discussed challenges that they became aware of through the graduate reading methods course, particularly while conducting research. One participant acknowledged:

What I was surprised about was the idea that there would be such a discrepancy between oral language use and a student's ability to read academic text. As a native English speaker if I can say it, I can read it. Knowing that this is not the case with ESL students will help me in the future. The professional articles gave many ideas on how to help ESL students learn to read. I feel more confident in my abilities to help a struggling ESL child, because I now understand the factors that can hinder their progress and how to combat those factors.

Utilizing small group instruction and read-alouds both became part of my daily reading lesson plans. Drucker's (2003) emphasis on ESL students lacking cues suggests that I need to provide a deeper context. Using recitation with motions and gestures as I teach, as well as previewing stories on a deeper level will be factors I am sure to address with upcoming school years.

No matter the challenges in doing so, participants overwhelmingly supported the notion of providing differentiated instruction and discussed several ways of doing so.

The primary focus area of participants when discussing differentiated instruction had to do with using culturally relevant

teaching strategies to promote ELL students' acquisition of literacy skills, specifically through tools such as multicultural literature. When ELL students read or listen to culturally and linguistically relevant texts, then vocabulary and sight words are more easily learned and ELL students have more opportunities to engage in meaning-making as they interact with texts (Keys Adair & Barraza, 2014).

Making multicultural literature available to all students can also foster personal narratives (Martinez-Roldan, 2003), mutual respect, and individual self-esteem and confidence. It is through the moral of the story, characters, and conflicts of such books that teachers can guide ELL students to connect with each other and the world around them; help them develop an understanding and respect for their own cultural groups as well as empathize with the tragedies and triumphs of others; and promote increased listening skills, vocabulary, and verbal proficiency.

Study participants offered several suggestions on specific culturally relevant teaching strategies that can be used to promote ELL students' acquisition of literacy skills:

By providing ESL students with high quality multicultural books we can help them find books that they can connect with. Language Experience Approach helps students to share their ideas and experiences with others.

One strategy to use to help build schema and bridge cultural difference is use folktales stories that the students might be familiar with in their country. Picture books and multicultural books can also be helpful. Teachers need to make sure the book is relevant, do not reinforce stereotypes but are true to cultural experiences, illustrations should also be true to the culturally experience, and the story should be appealing.

Language experience which works with letter recognition and phonetics; Interactive writing that directly involves student with the writing process and shows them the relationship between reading and writing; Total physical response which involves having the students sing, act out and be physically involved while learning; Narrow reading gives students several examples of stories with the same vocabulary; and Read aloud shows the importance of students being read to by a fluent reader.

Moreover, Language Experience Approaches (LEA) can assist language learners in literacy. Interactive writing also is another strategy Drake (2003) suggests. These strategies allow for students

to interact with each other and with the teacher during the writing process. This can help students see powerful examples of good writing.

Furthermore, participants discussed the integration of writing as a differentiated instructional method. By integrating writing with content at every level of instruction, teachers can not only differentiate instruction (Tomilson, 2001), they can also help ELL students find their own voices in their new language and promote the development of appropriate grammar, including writing skills at the sentence level. One-on-one writing conferences with the teacher can provide opportunities to focus on problem areas in writing, which in turn may boost ELL students' confidence as writers. One participant offered the following input related to this strategy:

In the area of composition, my ESL student understands that brainstorming is important to begin the writing process, the importance of descriptive words, the importance of using a consistent point of view, and is able to choose the appropriate words relative to tone, mood and purpose. He struggles using diagrams for prewriting, using figurative language, developing a central idea, revising to enhance or paraphrasing, using complex sentences to expand his ideas, and more advanced uses of punctuation. In the area of language convention, my next teaching step would involve the proper use of adjective and adverb clauses, as well as appositive clauses, using compound nouns and irregular nouns appropriately, and how to distinguish between active and passive voice. In the area of composition, the next step is to use appropriate organization, recognize the appropriate format to use, learn how to effectively brainstorm, and how to use literary devices in his writing.

Finally, participants discussed instructional strategies related to vocabulary. Teachers often find that ELL students' vocabulary choices are confusing, familiar elements of their essays may be missing, and their sentences may exhibit a variety of errors; all of these components result in a lack of writing competence that will affect their academic advancement. Thus, ELL students must learn many skills to develop academic and linguistic proficiency including word recognition skills with an emphasis on sounds of words, word patterns, vocabulary, and decoding strategies. One participant offered the following suggestion:

Teaching vocabulary is also a key element in building literacy skills for students who struggle with writing. One thing teachers

can do for ESL students is to show them how to write/label word meanings near words. Also, teachers can use a singing approach to teach vocabulary and use the narrow approach to reading to immerse the students in vocabulary over and over again.

#### **Assessment of Graduate Student Learning**

In addition, the findings of this study revealed that graduate students benefited significantly from the graduate reading methods course and learned how to differentiate strategies for ELLs. In fact, assessment via the course grading rubric resulted in participants falling overwhelmingly in the outstanding and satisfactory columns, with a mean score of 95.5 (see Figure 1). Specifically, 95% of the participants acquired knowledge on select theories of second language acquisition to positively impact ELL students' literacy skills. Furthermore, 92% of the participants expressed a need to become strategic teachers who could design lessons to address linguistic objectives in particular with learners whose primary language is other than English.

Interestingly, 92% of the participants felt that professional literature helped them deliver culturally responsive teaching to promote English language acquisition, raise the bar for learning for ELL students to include differentiated teaching, and effectively implement appropriate instructional accommodations, thus helping ELL students overcome linguistic barriers (Daniel, 2008). At least 90% of the participants assured equity by providing differentiated instruction to facilitate reading achievement of ESL students in the classroom.

Moreover, this study found that 92% of the participants felt that the reflection paper and focused dialogue helped them pay close attention to the need for culturally relevant teaching for helping ELLs develop

their linguistic competency. The graduate students found ways to incorporate curriculum that connects each individual ELL student's cultural background and involved students in a variety of reading, writing, listening, speaking, and viewing behaviors throughout the lesson plan.

Ninety-four percent of graduate student participants said that they implemented differentiated instruction based on ELL students' needs and made a conscious effort to ensure that each student's needs were being met. They explained that ELLs represented a wide range of academic skills, interests, languages, English language proficiency levels, and cultures. The graduate students learned about the importance of understanding each ELL student's background in order to better develop and implement appropriate research-based instruction for that student.

Finally, 93% of graduate students said that they prepared their ELL students by activating prior knowledge, scaffolding meaning-making with the texts, and developing ELLs' academic language practices in the classroom. They accomplished these tasks by providing ELLs with strategic types of scaffolding, such as visual aids or peer help, and removing these supports as students' skills developed. They modified the content for ELL students who needed additional practice with essential elements before mastering the skills or moving on.

#### **Conclusions and Discussion**

Based on the participants' reflective statements, it can be concluded that the course helped graduate students build the capacity to serve all students, including students who are learning English as a second language. They learned how to implement differentiated literacy instruction that allows ELLs to learn the same material as other students as they continue to develop their English language skills. However, many graduate students

**FIGURE 1**  
**Graduate Students Learned to Differentiate Instruction for ELL Students**



felt that they needed additional graduate classes to learn a greater variety of curriculum and instructional supports to respond to ELL students' needs in ways that produce deep learning.

While the number of English learners has increased substantially in the United States, only a few teachers have articulated a sense of confidence in their ability to plan instruction for ELL students (Crawford, 2004). As we prepare reading teachers, our teacher preparation programs must make certain all graduate students leave their university knowing how to help ELL students overcome the linguistic and cultural obstacles that they face at school. Students who are English language learners are a group with unmet academic needs in large part because of their lack of literacy skills and academic language (Burns & Helman, 2009). Teacher preparation programs must teach future reading specialists ways to work effectively with learners from different cultural and language backgrounds.

Teachers must provide adequate support for ELL students, understand the differences between and implications of conversational proficiency and academic proficiency, nurture the close ties between listening and reading, recognize the importance of choral and shared reading, implement flexible grouping techniques, understand different cultural practices and their implications in using cues and textual connections, acknowledge the importance of appropriately introducing vocabulary, and most importantly, address all of these issues within the classroom setting (Yesil-Dagli, 2011). Unfortunately, few teachers are prepared to do any, much less some or all, of these important tasks.

Thus, this study sought to examine how a graduate reading methods course provides teacher candidates opportunities for reflection and prepares them to differentiate instruction in ways that allow ELL students to achieve the literacy comprehension necessary to succeed in school. The use of differentiated instruction that prioritizes and supports cultural competence emerged as a salient theme. Based on their own experiences and what they learned in the reading methods course, participants reflected on challenges to providing effective support to ELL students and offered insight regarding differentiated instructional practices that are most relevant for ELL students.

### Limitations

A limitation of this qualitative study

lies in its generalizability in terms of sample characteristics and sample size. The participants were purposefully selected, and they were ideal for conducting this study. However, the fact that all of the participants were white and native English speakers, as well as experienced in their fields, contributes to the limitation of generalizability.

The fact that there are many non-White and non-native English-speaking teachers in public schools underscores this limitation. Also, the number of participants in this study was small and thus not generalizable, instead providing rich and thick contexts that allow readers a deeper knowledge of the context being studied. This approach enables readers to make their own judgments and decisions about the descriptions (Merriam, 1998).

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